

THE
NORMAN CONQUEST.

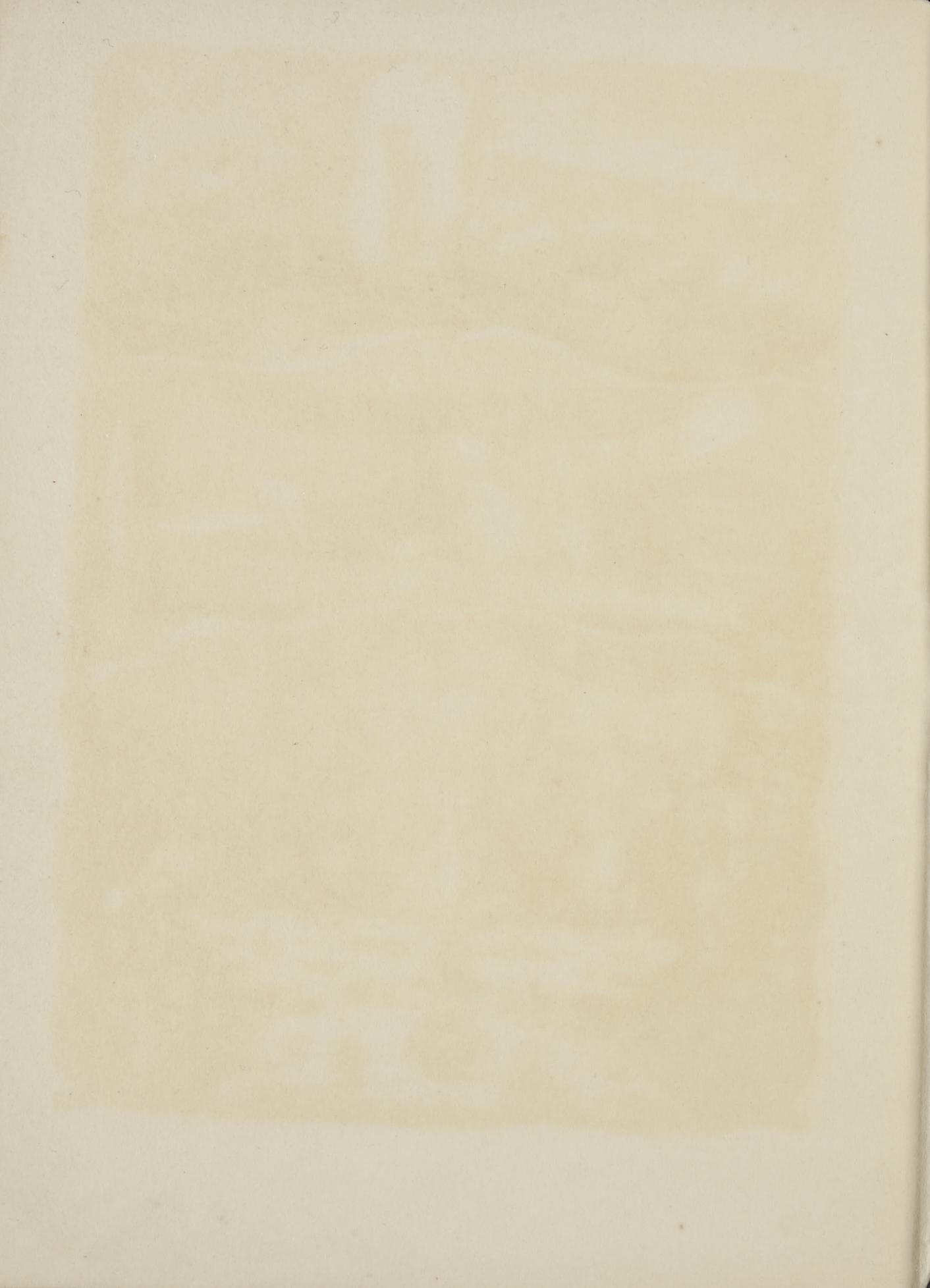
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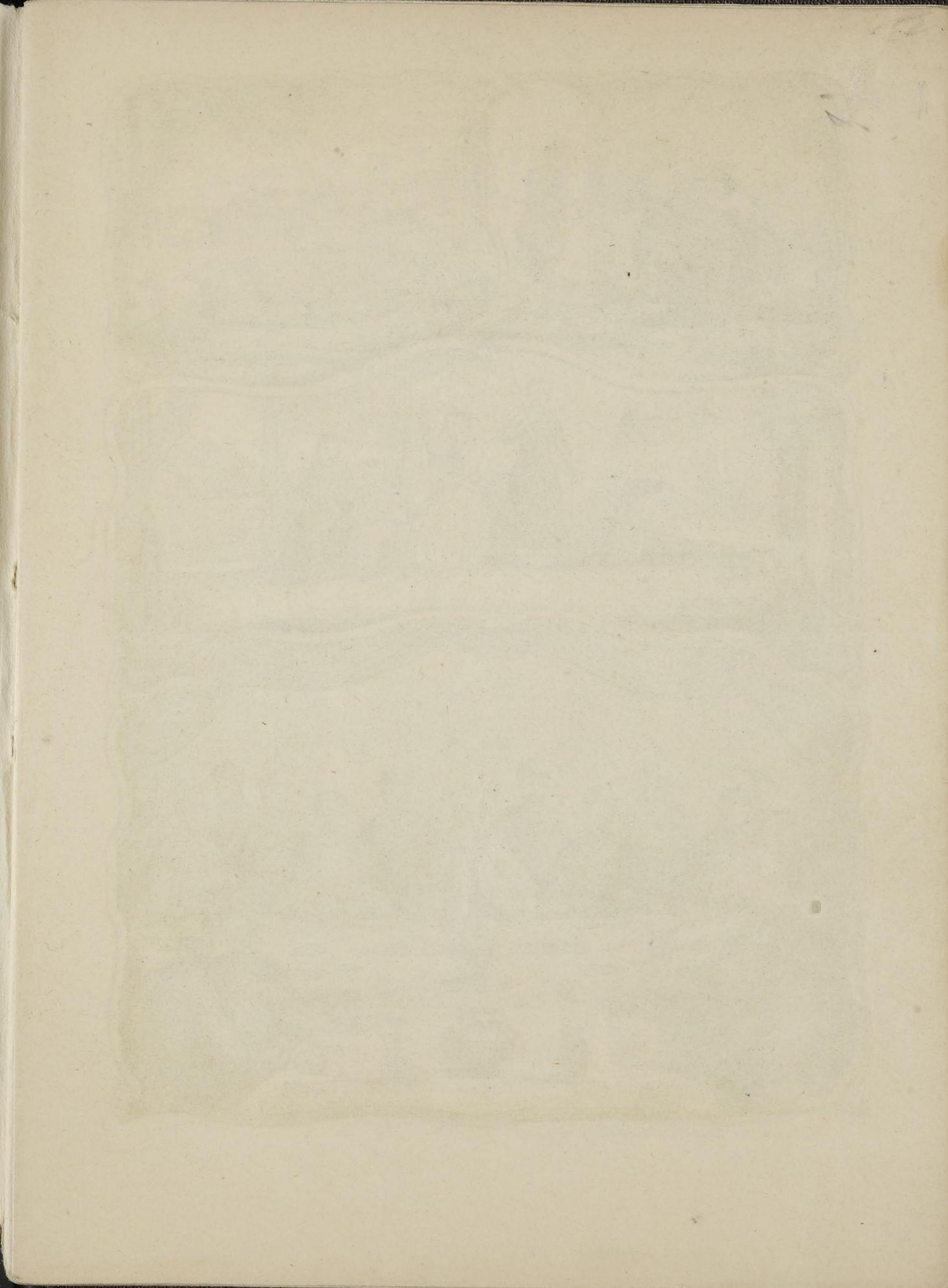
THE MANNER IN WHICH THE
PEOPLE OF ENGLAND
LIVED DURING THE REIGN
OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

BY MISS CORNER.
PRICE SIXPENCE.



LONDON DEAN AND SON THREADNEEDLE ST







Edward the Confessor entertains William

AN INTERESTING ACCOUNT OF THE
NORMAN CONQUEST;
AND THE
MANNER IN WHICH
THE PEOPLE OF
ENGLAND LIVED
DURING THE REIGN OF
WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

IN EASY LANGUAGE, FOR YOUNG CHILDREN,

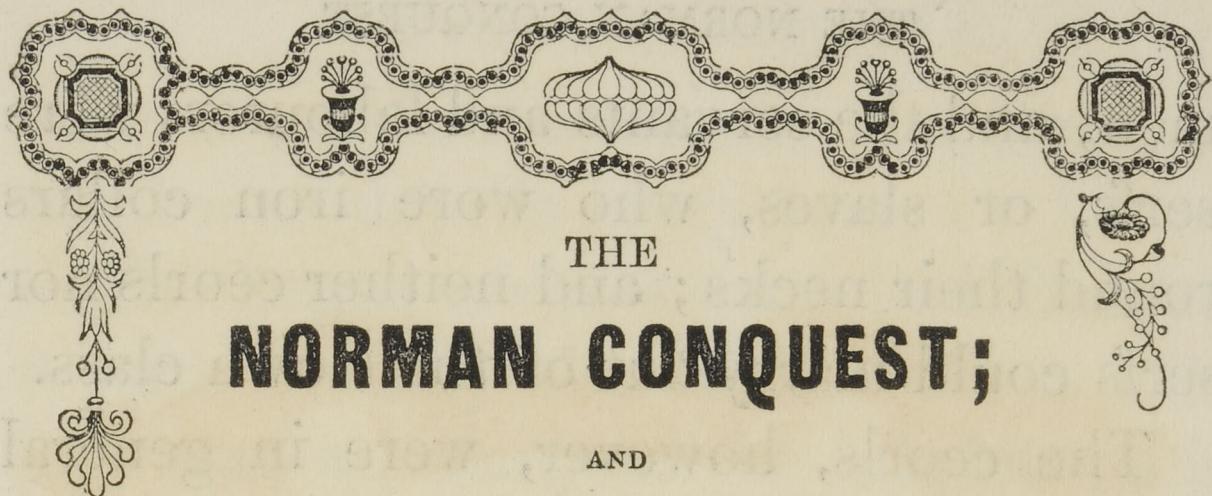
BY MISS CORNER.



Bartlet

The Monks of Ely sent privately to the Normans

LONDON:
THOMAS DEAN AND SON,
THREADNEEDLE STREET.



THE MANNER IN WHICH THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND LIVED
DURING THE REIGN OF
WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

THE Norman Conquest was the Conquest of England and its inhabitants, by William, Duke of Normandy, whom we call William the Conqueror. At the time of his invasion, the English, or Anglo Saxons, were, according to the ideas of those barbarous times, a free people, although two-thirds of them were really in bondage; for the farmers and mechanics were mostly ceorls, or vassals of the great

SECOND EDITION.

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men; and the servants and labourers were serfs, or slaves, who wore iron collars round their necks; and neither ceorls nor serfs could marry out of their own class.

The ceorls, however, were in general pretty well off, being in fact small farmers, living under the protection of the lord of the soil. They enjoyed many comforts in their rude cottages, for every one had a portion of land, and when he had paid in produce and labour what was due to his lord, by way of rent, all the rest was his own. Besides these small farmers, the lord of the domain had other ceorls, or vassals, who worked at different trades, such as smiths, carpenters, &c., many of whom lived in the villages, or small towns, in the neighbourhood of his dwelling, and it was their duty to supply him with a certain quantity of the articles they made, or

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to work at their trades for him a certain number of days in every year.

The larger towns were called Burghs, a term used by the Romans for a military station; many of the inhabitants in these burghs were free tradesmen and mechanics, who had gained their freedom for particular services, or by paying a sum of money to their lords, and some had been children of the smaller land-owners, called Franklins, or freemen.

The Saxons were not such good husbandmen as the Romans, so that corn was not so plentiful, and the common people usually made their bread of barley; but they had plenty of meat, for pasture land to feed cattle was cheap, or was in common, and quantities of pigs were fed on acorns in the forests. Sheep were reared chiefly for their wool, of which every

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family required a supply, as the clothing of all but the very highest classes was manufactured at home; so that all Saxon women, whatever their station in life might be, were constantly employed in spinning, knitting, weaving, and sewing.

The monasteries were very numerous at the time of the Norman invasion, and it is stated that the number of parish churches and villages was greater than at the present day; but whether this be true or not, most of the towns and villages in this country existed in the Saxon times, and were called by the same names as they are now, although they were then much smaller and the houses little better than sheds. And now for the story of the Norman Conquest.

When Edward the Confessor was king of England, his cousin William, Duke of



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Normandy, came on a visit to his court. Edward had been brought up in Normandy, and liked the Normans very much; so he entertained the Duke and his followers very sumptuously, to the great discontent of the English nobles, who did not like them. But more than this, Edward made a will, leaving his crown to Duke William, who returned to Normandy well contented.

The succession to the English crown was not then exactly regulated by law. The eldest son of the king often succeeded; but sometimes the nobles elected a king, and sometimes the sovereign appointed his own successor; but, in either case, it was necessary that the choice should be approved by the Wit-en-age-mote, or Parliament, otherwise it was void; and this was the reason William's claim was disputed.

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When Edward died, his wife's brother Harold was elected King, being a brave chief, and much beloved by the people. Then William, Duke of Normandy, laid claim to the crown, and invaded England with a large army. He landed near Hastings, in Sussex, where he set up a fortified camp; and as Harold did not come for sixteen days to oppose him, he suffered his soldiers to plunder the surrounding country, and burn down many of the villages, so that the terrified people shut themselves up in the churches for safety.

At length, King Harold, who had been in the north of England to subdue an insurrection of the Danes, arrived at the head of his army, and the famous battle of Hastings was fought on the 14th of October, 1066, which proved an unfortunate day for the English, who not only

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lost the battle, but their valiant king also, he being shot in the eye with an arrow.

But this was only the beginning of the Conquest, for the Anglo-Saxons were too brave to submit without a hard struggle to a foreign ruler; so the Normans had to fight many more battles, and it was seven years before William was fully acknowledged as King of England. During that period the English suffered all kinds of misery. Their towns were burned;—their houses, lands, and money taken from them;—and many thousands were killed by the invaders.

Soon after the victory at Hastings, the Conqueror marched his troops to Dover, where he took possession of the castle, and set fire to the town. He had been opposed on his way, and had committed dreadful ravages in consequence; but it is said, that

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as he returned through Kent, a body of Kentish men, headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, suddenly issued from a forest, and offered to acknowledge him as king, provided they might enjoy the same freedom as before. It is added, that he granted a charter, or written promise, to that effect; but there is nothing on record to shew that he kept his word.

He next laid siege to London, and stationed his soldiers round the city, so that no provisions could be carried in; and he burned down all the houses outside the walls, and killed or drove away the people for miles around. The citizens made a brave defence; but at last, fearing they should die of famine, they agreed to receive him for their king, and opened the gates of the city. He did not enter then, but sent part of his army, to prepare for

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him a safe abode; and they built a fortress, which was enlarged in after times, and is now the Tower of London. William was crowned in the Abbey of Westminster on Christmas day, 1066; and many Saxon or English chiefs, seeing it was in vain to resist, went to do him homage; and those who did so were promised full possession of their lands and honours; but the wily Conqueror meant to dispossess them of those lands and honors as soon as his power was sufficiently established.

Meantime, the estates of the English nobles, who had not submitted, were given to Normans, who took possession of them by force; while others gained lands by compelling the widows and heiresses of those who had fallen in the battle of Hastings, or who had been killed elsewhere, to marry them. In short, every one who had

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followed William to England, expected to be made rich and great out of the spoils of the conquered people, and he was willing to gratify them.

The English monks were driven from their monasteries, to make room for Norman monks. The English bishops, too, were deprived of their benefices ; so that even the church and abbey lands, with the ceorls and serfs who cultivated them, passed, like the estates of the Saxon nobles, into the hands of the Normans. Then Norman castles were erected upon most of the large estates, and houses were pulled down in the towns, to make room for them, the inmates being turned out to find homes where they could. The serfs and peasants, both men and women, were compelled to labour at these works, while the Norman soldiers urged them on with their staves.

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The forcible impressment of these labourers to build castles was the origin of the press-gangs of modern times.

Thousands upon thousands of warlike Normans pouring into England, William gradually became master of the whole country; but every step he gained was marked by violence and bloodshed, and his soldiers were permitted to rob and ill-treat the English with impunity. Some of them were quartered in every land-owner's house, where they took what they pleased, without paying for it, and made it their sport to insult the family, who dared not resent their insolence; but were often too glad to give up to them the best part of their possessions that they might keep the remainder in peace.

At length the king declared his intention of reducing all the English nobles to a

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state of bondage, and giving all the landed property in the country to Norman nobles. Then many men of rank, despoiled of their estates, fled with their families and ceorls to the woods, to live by plunder ; and the many bands of robbers, thus formed, were not suppressed for several reigns.

Among these dispossessed nobles was one named Hereward, lord of a large domain in Lincolnshire. This brave chief resolved to make an effort to restore his countrymen to freedom : so he established a fortified camp in the Isle of Ely, among the lakes and fens of Cambridgeshire, which was then marshy land, half covered with water, and it became a place of refuge for men of all classes; bishops, abbots, and nobles; who, with the peasants of Ely, most of whom were vassals on the abbey-lands of Ely and Croyland, formed quite an



Coronation Procession of William the Conqueror



English outlaws become
Robbers

Churches & Houses
destroyed in Hampshire



The Curfew Bell.

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army. The heavily-armed Normans could not find their way through these fens, so that the English often way-laid and cut off parties of them, and made good their retreat to the camp of refuge, by paths known only to themselves.

William long tried to destroy this camp, but in vain ; at last he blockaded the Isle of Ely with boats, filled with soldiers, and began to build causeways, to enable the Normans to get into it ; but Hereward repeatedly surprised the guards, and attacked and destroyed the works.

At last, provisions grew scarce in the camp, and some of the monks of Ely, despairing of success, sent privately to the Norman castle, which had been erected at Cam bridge, offering to guide the Normans into the island, provided they would promise not to take their abbey. The camp

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was thus surprised and taken, and the English treated with shocking barbarity ; but the monks who betrayed them were justly punished, by meeting with all kinds of robbery and ill usage from the Norman soldiers, who were quartered in the abbey.

The English had now been fighting for their liberty upwards of six years, but, after this event, they gave up the contest, and William became absolute king of England, and a great tyrant he was. One of his early acts was to destroy upwards of sixty parishes and thirty churches in Hampshire, under pretence of making a forest for hunting, but, in reality, to keep the city of Winchester, where he resided, with the port of Southampton, clear of Saxons ; and he made no compensation to either poor or rich, whom he thus cruelly turned out of their lands and homes.

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He then made laws which deprived the people of their ancient right of hunting and killing game in the forests ; and these new laws were so severe, that no Saxon was allowed to enter within the boundary of any of the forests and chases, of which there were then more than eighty in England. It was made a greater crime to kill a deer than to kill a fellow-creature ; for the murderer was only punished by a fine, but the deer-slayer had his eyes torn out. Such was the origin of our game laws.

The other institutions of the country were not materially altered. There were still three distinct classes of society ; the nobles, the vassals, and the serfs. The latter could not be worse off than they were before ; but the vassals, who were called villeins by the Normans, instead of ceorls, were greatly oppressed by their new

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masters, who exacted from them much more than their Saxon lords had done, and treated them besides with scorn. The Curfew-bell, which was rung at sunset, to warn the people to cover or put out their fires, was established in this reign, and surnames were first used.

Some of the great Saxon families were afterwards restored to a part of their former possessions, and in course of time the distinction between the Norman and Saxon races wore away among the higher classes; but the lower orders were all of Saxon origin, for many centuries. How they gradually became a free and wealthy people, will be seen in the following parts of our History, wherein we shall next show what came to pass in England in

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